Legislative Issue Brief – Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF)

> **Catawba County Board of Commissioner's Legislative Goal**
>
> **Support improvements to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) and other safety net programs so that all families have necessary work supports and TANF focuses on positive outcomes for families and reducing poverty**

Background

From 1996, the year when TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), to 2004, the share of eligible families receiving assistance from the program fell by half, from 84 percent to 42 percent. Over that same period, the real value of the basic TANF block grant has declined 28 percent due to inflation.   TANF will need to be reauthorized in 2010. The last reauthorization, part of the Deficit Reduction Act, forced states to focus almost exclusively on meeting a strict work participation requirement for families receiving assistance. Both regulations and sub-regulatory guidance has been used to further restrict state flexibility. In particular, these policies have made it hard for states to allow recipients to participate in education and training, or to make appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities, as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Therefore**,** as part of TANF reauthorization, states should be given more flexibility to develop welfare-to-work programs that meet the needs of a diverse group of recipients, engage participants in skill-building activities, and shift the focus from work participation rates to outcomes and poverty reduction. The flexibility should be developed with written feedback and participation at town meetings or listening sessions, with explicit and visible invitations to states and advocates to participate, leading up to development of principles and a vision for reauthorization.

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